Multicultural Confluence and Political Reflections in the Fiction of Rohinton Mistry

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INTRODUCTION:

Indian Literature in English originated as a necessary outcome of the introduction of English education in India under colonial rule. By Indian Writing in English, we mean literature written by Indians in English language. It could be in the form of poetry, prose, fiction or drama. It is now recognized that Indian English literature is not only a part of Commonwealth Literature, but also occupies an important place in the world literature. Among the twentieth century writers Rohinton Mistry is an Indian born, Canada based, short-story writer and a novelist. He has become one of the pre-eminent writers of the post-colonialist writing movement. He now lives in Toronto, Canada. His novels are primarily set in his native Bombay, presenting an honest and loving image of India. As a Parsi, Mistry is part of a dwindling community of fewer than 1, 25,000 people worldwide, most of whom are concentrated around Bombay. Parsis are descendants from the religious followers of Zoroastrianism who fled from Iran to avoid forced conversion to Islam.

As India offers them a safe haven, present day Parsis are subject to marginalization. Mistry grew up in this changed atmosphere in a Parsi dominated area of Bombay. Mistry published his first book, a collection of short stories called *Tales From Firozsha Baag* in 1987, released in the United States two years later with the alternate title *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag*. This work was shortlisted for Canada's Governor General Award for best fiction.

When his first novel, *Such A long Journey*, was published in 1991, it won the Governor General's Award, the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for best book. It was short listed for the Prestigious Booker Prize. Mistry's second novel, *A Fine Balance* (1995), won the Annual Giller Prize and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction. His third novel, *Family Matters* (2002) was also short listed for the Booker Prize.

Rohinton Mistry is an expatriate Indian-Parsi writer who lives in Canada. As a Parsi and an immigrant in Canada, he looks himself as a symbol of double displacement and this sense of displacement is a recurrent theme in his literary works. His historical situation includes development of new identity in the nation to which he has migrated and a complex relationship with political and cultural history of the nation he has left behind. Generally Indian Diasporas suffer from a sense of triple displacement. They are deprived of their native place; they enter into an alien land and find themselves among people whose culture and codes are different and sometimes offensive to their own.

TITLE OF THE STUDY:

Mistry's books portray diverse facets of Indian socio-economic life, as well as Parsi Zoroastrian life, customs and religion. Many of his writings are marked as "Indo-nostalgic". His works propose to look at the anguished Parsi way of life and also peep in thick coverings of Parsi ethnicity with the essence of Parsi spirit. Parsi people were persecuted in their homeland in Persia because of their distinct religious identity. They were provided refuge in India many centuries ago. They have contributed much to Indian economy, politics and society. Parsis have proved themselves as an example for the rich society of India.

Being the miniscule minority in India, the Parsis do experience ethnic anxiety; they feel insecure, experience identity crisis and feel threatened by possible submersion in the dominant Hindu culture, a nightmarish prospect which they do not ever want to come true. Along with these, there are other disturbing problems namely: declining population, late marriages, low birth rate, high rate of divorce, attitudes to the girl child, urbanization, alienation etc. All these issues find expression in the post independence Parsi writing in English. Mistry's characters, represent the Parsi Community, whose identity has been historically problematized. It is a progressive community with a glorious past and a dismal future. Mistry attempts at giving details about the lifestyles and culture of the Parsis wherever he gets an opportunity in his fiction.

As a chronicler of Parsi Community, Mistry is keenly aware of his Community's predicament. In the recent years, a large numbers of young Parsis have chosen to migrate to the West, Mistry who belongs to them also hopes to; recover a life of comfort and pride. All the works of Mistry foregrounds the heterogeneity of identity within Parsi Community and the dynamic nature of Parsi community itself.

The accounts of the political turmoil and the resultant subjection of the minorities referred to in the novel are not to be delimited to the mere fictionality of the novel. Rather, as Mistry is writing from the cultural sphere of an ethnic minority, these accounts are to be approached as resulting, from the writer's interest and participation in the socio-political scenario of the country in the post-independence era. Although he has not lived in his native India for many years, like many expatriate writers, he continues a relationship with his country of birth through his writings. He has enriched his readers' understanding of India, its society, cultures and politics, reflecting extensively on issues of human rights and responsible citizenship. Thus the proposed title of the present research study is—

"**Multicultural Confluence and Political Reflections in the Fiction of Rohinton Mistry**"

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

Mistry's novels are the powerful piece of observation and criticism from multicultural and political point of view. The researcher strives to find out the following aims and objectives.

1) To discover the confluence of multiculturalism in Mistry's works.
2) To explore plurality and diversity in the writings of Rohinton Mistry.
3) To explore native culture, customs and religious practices of the Parsi community as in the fiction of Rohinton Mistry.
4) To study the role of politics and history in shaping the individual human life and the state in Mistry's works.
5) To find how Rohinton Mistry has intertwined history and politics in his works.

6) To examine the socio-political, cultural turmoil as portrayed in Mistry's works.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The topic selected for the present study is new and different from earlier studies. The research has already been carried on the topic "Humanism in Rohinton Mistry's fiction but this study reflects the humanistic aspect of Rohinton Mistry's writing. Hence the researcher would propose to examine the fiction of Rohinton Mistry from the perspective of culture, Indian culture in general and Parsi culture in particular that is missing in the already carried out research. Thus the researcher wants to study the fiction of Rohinton Mistry from Multicultural point of view along with history and politics.

Some of the research studies done on Mistry are: 1. The review of the book-The Novels of Amitav Ghosh, ShashiTharoor, Upamanayu Chatterje and Rohinton Mistry- A Thematic Study by Dr. Mansing Kadam focusses on culture, custom and codes of the Parsi community to which the writer belongs. 2. M. Kumari has submitter her doctoral thesis in Maharshi Dayanand University entitled as "Humanism in Rohinton Mistry's fiction".

HYPOTHESIS

The researcher assumes that the fiction of Mistry is packed with multiculturalism and history.History-fiction interface, practiced by Rohinton Mistry, is fascinating and culturally significant. Various known political events form a part of his thematic concerns. His novels explore the relationships among self, community, place and identity, validating the local and embracing the syncretic nature of post-colonial experience, be it in North America or India. His first two works foreground the heterogeneity of identity within Parsi community and the dynamic nature of Parsi community itself. One of the most remarkable features of Rohinton Mistry's fiction is that it brilliantly captures the crowded, throbbing life of India. No wonder, there has been a widespread growth of interest in his writings; his novels are closely linked with social and political background. In fact he is well versed with all undercurrents of

Indian politics. If one studies his novels from political point of view, one realizes that Rohinton Mistry's knowledge of Indian politics is not at all far removed from reality though he left India in 1975 to settle in Canada. The types of episodes one come across in Mistry's novels are certainly observed day to day in our Indian politics. For instance, corruption, politically motivated schemes, political decision, layman's sufferings, caste-problem, dominance of *Zamindars* over the downtrodden masses occupy considerable space in his novels.

"Thus Rohinton Mistry is concerned and conscious of his Parsi community and culture in his works and yearns for multiculturalism. Moreover the thread of history and politics runs through his fiction".

Mistry prefers to write about India, which engages his imagination. Living in Canada and writing about India, Mistry is fully aware of several drawbacks of India's social and political life, as is discernible in his novels. The researcher comes to the hypothesis that it will be interesting to note the role of multiculturalism and politics. These factors play key role in Mistry's novels.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the present research, the textual study of Mistry's fiction will be undertaken. Through the critical response and reviews of his novels, an attempt will be made for drawing conclusion. The researcher is proposed to use the primary and secondary sources. Analytical and interpretative methodology will be adopted for the proposed study. Objectivity helps man in knowing and revealing the truth of a work of art. To achieve this, the researcher would like to be analytical and objective in his present research. Mistry fiction will be critically evaluated, interpreted and analyzed with critical opinions of the earlier research. Descriptive, exploratory, interpretative and analytical methods will be supported by inductive and deductive methods of thinking.

DATA COLLECTION

The main source of data collection for any research is library. The researcher will visit various libraries of the country to collect data for study. The primary sources will be the text by Rohinton Mistry and secondary sources will be the reference books, anthologies, websites, special issues and critical articles and reviews on the writer. Moreover, the modern technological resources will be used by the researcher.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Modern India remains a central metaphor with its splendid multiculturalism, ideologies, thoughts, experiences, history, politics and human relationships which have ensnared the native as well as the expatriate imagination. Rohinton Mistry has located India as a state of mind an approach to life. Certainly, the works of Rohinton Mistry display Indian historical and political ruptures, socio-cultural milieu as a bright mirror of religious and cultural diversity so as to be the eye openers to the natives as well as to the Westerners. Rohinton Mistry's works serve as a beacon to the new generation in broadening of the mind, inculcating values and vision of life and building of characters which are essential for multiculturalism and religious diversity resulting in socio-political and economic development of the nation. He yearns for positive, humane and down to earth approach to life and to redefine the global issue of culture and politics. Religious bigotry often clashes in the fiction of Rohinton Mistry against rival religion such as Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Christianity but aims at harmony, absolute peace and for moral and spiritual values that are vital for the noble cause of humanity. Therefore, the researcher has decided to study the fiction of Rohinton Mistry from multicultural and political point of view.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

The researcher will deal with the three novels of Rohinton Mistry-*Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters* along with the collection of short stories namely *Tales From Firozsha Baag.* Besides Rohinton Mistry

three novels and a collection of short stories, extensive literature, survey of academic journals, reports and books would be undertaken highlighting his description of native culture, history, politics and multiculturalism as per the needs and convenience of the research. In short, this research would be restricted to the select fiction only; however, as per need a few texts would be added or skipped at the juncture or in an ambivalent situation.

No community and culture are developed in isolation. It is the outcome of the history and politics of the land where it lives. The study of the works of Rohinton Mistry which deals with its minor-Parsi community its culture in particular and Indian culture in general during turmoil of politics, history and religion longs and yearns for multiculturalism and pluralistic society. Therefore the same study of any minority community in the majoritarianism would be helpful for bringing diversity and multiculturalism. Further, the study of the literary works of an émigré and a socio-political novelist like Rohinton Mistry concerning the Parsi community and its culture definitely has significance in cultural lines, sociological analysis, and political implications and from the perspective of literary theory.

PLAN OF WORK:

1) Collection of study materials (Primary and Secondary Sources)

2) Data Collection

3) Compilation of data

4) Study of Multicultural Confluence and Political Reflections

5) Initial and Final drafts of the thesis

6) Submission of Thesis

TENTATIVE CHAPTER SCHEME:

The present research work has been divided into following tentative chapters:

Chapter 1: **Introduction**

Chapter 2: **Exploration of Native Culture**

Chapter 3: **History and Politics: fission and fusion**

Chapter 4: **Cross-Cultural Impressions**

Chapter 5: **Conclusion**

Bibliography

Chapter 1: **Introduction**

The first chapter of the research study is Introduction of post-independence Indian Novel in English. A critical survey of the post independence novels will be made. Then, Rohinton Mistry, the writer in making will be focused. An analysis of his works, themes, cultural and political concerns and his art will be done. In this chapter the researcher will analyze the relationship between politics, religion and culture going through a variety of other themes such as alienation, multiculturalism and sense of displacement in the fiction of Rohinton Mistry.

Chapter 2: **Exploration of Native Culture**

Chapter second will explore socio-cultural and political realities of India between 1960 and 1990. It will closely examine the social, political and economic problems of people arising out of emergency, exploitation, social evils and wars. It will deal with a comparison of the structures of religion and culture, and how they are manifested in the novels. Mistry recognizes the significance of religion and ritual in the construction of human identity. He,

therefore, use religion, ritual and the responses to these as a central theme in his fictions.

It is this relationship which will be the object of study in this work. This thesis attempts to unfold the dynamics between politics and religion, especially concerning Parsis, and how the issues that pervade the plot, such as culture, migration, identity are presented in the novel.

Chapter 3: **History and Politics: fission and fusion**

The third chapter focuses on the important themes of Mistry's writings like history and politics. They are the inherent to the writings and consciousness of the writer. Mistry is well-versed with all the under currents of Indian politics. As his novels are closely linked with the social and political background, there has been a wide spread growth in his writings. The third chapter will have a political and historical analysis of his fiction.

Chapter 4: **Cross-Cultural Impressions**

This chapter deals with the writer's diasporic consciousness and sense of displacement in his works. His literary works most resonantly evoke the issue of identity, ranging from a relatively reconciled sense of self belonging to two or more geographical areas, to intensely conflicting, often shattering feelings of dislocation and alienation. In these stories, Mistry articulates the ambivalent space between the old culture of India and new Canada. Caught between the two, his characters and narrator, sometimes in spite of themselves, are engaged in defining their own hybridity. The major concern of the study is to focus on the divergent aspects like religion, culture, politics and cross-cultural dilemma in the novels of Rohinton Mistry.

Chapter 5: **Conclusion**

The present study will explore all-pervasive themes of multicultural confluence and politics in the fiction of Rohinton Mistry. The last chapter will bring out the conclusion based on the rock foundation of the earlier chapters.

The present chapter scheme is tentative. If necessary, some changes will be made. But the broad area, nature and scope of the study will remain the same.

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